

Sock Walk

All Ages

Most plants spend their entire life cycle rooted in one place. Plant seeds, however, can travel! This allows plants to move and grow in new places. Scientists call this seed dispersal. Dispersal means to scatter or to spread. There are many ways for seeds to spread from place to place.

Some seeds move by flying through the air when the wind blows. Have you ever helped disperse seeds by blowing on a dandelion seed head? Some seeds, like the coconut, float away on the water. Many plants depend on animals to help disperse their seeds. Often, when animals eat seeds or fruit, the seeds are swallowed.



Later the seeds are left behind in the animal's poop. The seeds will grow where they have been dropped with a little 'fertilizer'. Birds are very good at this sort of seed dispersal. Some seeds, like the burdock, hitch a ride on passing animals (and humans). They fall off in a new place to grow.

Take a **Sock Walk** and discover how many plants in your neighbourhood are 'hitchhikers'. (Remember, always check for ticks after being outside.)

To begin, talk about the animals that might walk about the fields or green spaces in your neighbourhood – dogs, cats, foxes, squirrels, birds, mice and so on. You could pretend to be one of these animals for the walk. Pull a woolen-type thick sock over one shoe. A men's athletic tube sock works well. Go for a walk through a weedy field, along a hedgerow or through an overgrown ditch. Walk through and over all sorts of plants just as animals would. Remove the sock and look at the different types of seeds collected. Talk about the features that help the seeds stick to things. Maybe sort and count the seeds.

I wonder . . .

- what kind of plant these seeds will become?
- where the animals would take seeds that stick to them?
- if the animals know they have seeds stuck on them?
- how far seeds might travel from their "mother plant?"
- what types of places might these seeds end up growing in?
- in what other ways can seeds move from place to place?
- if animals and birds spread seeds with their muddy feet?

Even more fun!

Get the sock good and muddy. If it is too dry, give the sock a spray with water to help it pick up soil. When you finish the walk, take the sock off, mud-side out. Put the sock into a resealable plastic bag and spritz it with water to dampen the sock. Seal the bag. When you get home, hang the bag in a sunny window. Check daily to see what sprouts to life (this should take about a week). Try to predict how many seeds will sprout.

Go exploring and look for seeds. Use a magnifying glass to look closely at the seeds. Can you figure out how they are dispersed?



Follow-up Activities

1. Draw and describe your favourite seed or seeds from the sock.
2. Draw a picture describing how seeds can get from one place to another.
3. Create an imaginary seed with special features that help it move about.



Gently squeeze a Jewelweed seed pod, and experience **expulsion** seed dispersal!